

Lessons Learned from the Pharisees
"How to Overcome a Contentious Spirit" – Part 1
Mark 7:1-23

Introduction:

1. Many people in life go from job to job, church to church, marriage to marriage, friendship to friendship, etc. Do you know why? They have a contentious spirit. Some people seem to never be happy. Why? They have a contentious spirit.
2. I love Webster's definition of contentious - "exhibiting an often perverse and wearisome tendency to quarrels and disputes."
3. Let's turn and look at **Proverbs 26:21-22. Contentious people:**
 - **Stir up strife** - they always have an issue, an axe to grind, a problem. Somebody didn't do it right, etc. They are always getting people stirred up.
 - **Hurt people** - as they hop from job to job, church to church, relationship to relationship, they leave a trail of blood, and it's not their own; it is everybody else that was **wrong**. Contentious people seldom resolve anything - they run.
4. You must be honest with yourself and ask, "Do I tend to have a contentious spirit?" You will never overcome it until you first get honest with yourself about it.
5. The Pharisees had a problem with this in Jesus' day. They were always stirring something up and in the middle of contention.
 - **Example: Mark 7:1-5**
 - What was the big issue here? Jesus' disciples eating without washing their hands.
6. The Pharisees gave a facade of being very religious, but they never experienced the blessing and joy of true spirituality. They were a miserable lot, and one of the main reasons was that they possessed a contentious spirit.
7. Let's look into this Bible text and draw out three facts that a person must come to accept if they are to ever overcome a contentious spirit.

First fact: My preferences are not Bible.

1. In verses 3-5 the Pharisees are all worked up over this thing. Think about it - washing hands, cups, tables, pots, etc. Who cares? Only the Pharisees. Only their exclusive group. It was one of their petty little preferences.
2. It was tradition, not Bible. Look what Jesus said in verses 6-9.
3. This same thing happens in churches today all the time. People will get all up in the air over an issue that is not even a Bible issue. It is strictly a preference.
 - Have you ever heard this, "But we have always done it that way." It's tradition! Tradition was very important to the Pharisees (we've always washed our hands before we've eaten).
 - Likewise it is typically very important to people with a contentious spirit.
 - Tradition in and of itself is not wrong or wicked. Many traditions are pleasant and effective. We have traditions that we hold to as a family and they are great. Church families have traditions that are great.
4. But remember, traditions are preferences, not Bible. It is wrong when we hold to our preferences like they are cherished Bible truth, such as the blood atonement, or

the deity of Christ, or salvation by grace through faith. When we hold to traditions and preferences this way, we can become very contentious and unhappy people.

5. We must learn to humble ourselves by laying aside our preferences. When we are able to do this without griping (and letting everybody know that we are unhappy), then we know we are on our way to maturing as Christians.
6. But those that think that their preferences are Bible can't deal with change.
 - But guess what? If something is alive, it grows and changes. It is the law of life. Living things don't stay the same. The day you physically stop changing; you're dead!
 - The day you stop changing as a Christian, you are spiritually dead and will be relegated to the life of the Pharisee (just a contentious, self-consumed, miserable person).
7. One of our mottos around here is "grow and change." What are you doing to grow and change? It may mean that you will have to leave your comfort zone and lay aside some preferences.
8. What is our church doing to change and try to be more effective at reaching people? It may include laying aside some preferences or traditions that we like.
 - But remember, the church is not about our traditions, preferences, and little things that we love and cherish. It is about reaching people with the life-changing message of Christ.
 - I am not talking about compromising or becoming a ministry that utilizes fleshly appeal to try to reach people. I am talking about the willingness to lay aside our personal comfort and preferences, if it helps reach people.
9. When Christ came to call Israel to repentance and to prepare them for their coming kingdom, Christ brought many changes.
10. The Pharisees couldn't deal with the changes Jesus brought. Why? Because they clung to their preferences and traditions more than to Christ. What was the result? They were contentious and miserable people.